

STINGY BOB

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CHAPTER I

He had come down from the country, and by the help of an honest face, a bright eye and a quick step, had secured a situation as errand boy in one of the great city stores. It was an immense establishment, and counted on its wage roll a considerable number of boys and young men.

Robert Sales, as we will know him, had been in the store for nearly two years, and all along gave such good satisfaction that he had received several promotions, and now drew a very good salary.

It began to be observed, however, that the possession of money made no change in the young man's habits. He eschewed all forms of extravagance, dressed plainly, ate frugal fare, spent nothing on cigarettes or soda water, wasted no money on theatres, excursions, treats, or any of the popular forms of social dissipation.

This example of rigid economy soon became displeasing to his associates, the majority of whom spent all their earnings on themselves, and after the failure of repeated attempts to draw him to their way of thinking and manner of life they gave him the name of Stingy Bob.

Now Robert was like all other boys, keenly sensitive to the ridicule of his companions and it was a great trial to have to bear an epithet indicative of sordid selfishness, and expressive of contempt. The temptation to be and to do like his fellows in order to escape their gibes was very great, and the battle thus set in motion was severe and painful.

"You had better give in, at least this once, Bob," said one of the older clerks to him one day. In return for much kindly consideration upon the part of the manager the whole subordinate force from book-keeper to errand boy had resolved to give him a grand banquet on the occasion of his birth day anniversary. Robert subscribed to this, but it was noted that he did so apparently with a bad grace, for when putting down his name he muttered that it would be much better to take the money and feed the really hungry.

When it came to the fund for the costly present intended for the same official he flatly refused to give a cent, saying that he had no money for rich presents to people who did not need them.

"Your name will not appear on the roll of subscriber," said the clerk, "and everybody will notice the omission."

This thought kept Robert from the banquet, and his absence accentuated his apparent stinginess, and brought down upon him a storm of opprobrium. The manager noticed his attitude, and exhibited a slight degree of stiffness and coldness toward the young man which his sensitive nature was quick to detect.

CHAPTER II

Mr. Compton, the senior partner in the great establishment, was a kind and observ-

ant Christian gentleman who took a personal interest in his employees, and who was, moreover, active in much charitable work among the destitute of the great city. He organized various relief movements, and beside his own liberal contributions he enlisted the benevolence of other wealthy citizens, and thereby poured a continual stream of beneficence into the destitute neighborhoods, bringing hope and comfort to many who otherwise would have been overwhelmed with helplessness and despair.

He provided food for the hungry, medicines for the sick, clothing for the naked, fuel for the freezing, and instruction for the ignorant.

It happened, however, that the junior partner was a man of the world who thought of little else but the success of his business. He rarely troubled himself to inquire into a matter any further than the effect it had, or might have, upon the interests of the firm. He made up his mind that the constant friction between Robert and his associates was injurious to those interests, and concluded that the easiest solution of the matter was to relieve the young man of his situation, provided he could not make him change his course.

"I like your work well enough," said he, "but why do you manage to win the contempt of your associates and have all this bad feeling in the house?"

"Haven't I the right to spend my money as I please, or not to spend it?"

"Within certain limits I should say yes," replied the junior partner. "We do not want any of our boys to dissipate, and thereby render themselves unfit for the discharge of their duties, but you carry your parsimony so far as to make it conspicuous and offensive. You dress, I might say, rather shabbily, and you spend nothing with our patrons on the street. You project yourself as a disturbing element into the minds of your associates, and thereby have them occupied with you when they ought to be absorbed in their duties."

"I am very sorry," replied Robert, "but it is impossible for me to act differently. If you think that my presence here is prejudicial to the firm, Mr. Bargane, I will go."

"Well, if you are bent on following your eccentric way of life I suppose it would be the best thing to do. It will not inconvenience you greatly, I presume. Undoubtedly you have saved a considerable sum of money by this time."

"Not a cent," replied Robert.

Mr. Bargane lifted his eyebrows in great surprise. "Not a cent," he ejaculated, "why then, what have you been doing with your money? Spent it in secret dissipations, eh? That makes the matter much worse."

"You should not judge without the evidence, sir," replied Robert. "Am I to understand that you have discharged me?"

"You can state the case in different terms, if you wish. When our employees are discovered to have expensive habits of an un-

known character, which they indulge in secret, we are justified in smelling danger. But tell me what have you done with your money?"

"If I am discharged I am under less obligations than before to tell you anything about it, which amounts to no obligation at all."

"O, well, if you want to be insolent as well as obstinate I presume you are ready to accept the consequences."

"As long as I am faithful, punctual and efficient in the discharge of my duties, Mr. Bargane, I hold that no one has the right to question me concerning the use which I make of my own time and my own money."

"And I think very differently, young man," said the junior partner, severely. "I propose to govern this establishment according to my own views and not according to yours."

"And I propose to conduct my private life and my private affairs irrespective of any man's dictation," replied the young man, hotly, as he turned to leave the office.

"Think twice of what you will do," called out the junior partner, who, after all, was loath to lose a good worker, and was quite conscious in a vague sort of way that his attitude toward the young man was dictated by his arbitrary and somewhat inflammable temper, rather than by his better judgment.

"I have no option but to resign, Mr. Bargane," replied Robert, as he closed the door.

CHAPTER III

"Where is young Sales?" inquired Mr. Compton, an hour later, as he entered the office with his customary pleasant greeting.

"Gone, I presume," replied the junior partner. "He and I had a misunderstanding this morning and the young scamp was so insolent as well as obstinate that I told him he might quit if he wished."

"Indeed: what was the trouble?"

"Well, the boy has been running about at nights, no one knows where, and spending all his money presumably in unlawful employments and pleasures. When a young fellow begins to do this he will very soon be spending money which is not his own, and I concluded it would be best to get rid of him in time."

"You are very wise," replied Mr. Compton. "I am already aware that young Sales is spending other people's money in his clandestine enterprises."

"Ah! So it seems I have figured him out correctly."

"Yes, indeed," replied Mr. Compton. "I made an interesting, you might say startling, discovery a few days ago, and to show you how sound and penetrating your judgment has been in this case you must come with me tonight and see for yourself."

At the hour appointed the two gentlemen walked down a dimly lighted street, noted for the poverty and squalor of its wretched inhabitants. Suddenly Mr. Compton turned into the dark entrance of a large and rickety tenement house.

"Where in the world are you going?" said